

**A MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
AND HIS CONSULTA TO THE NEWLY ERECTED
CAMILLIAN PROVINCE OF INDIA
January 30 – February 8, 2016**

“Seeking the face of God in everything, everyone, all the time, and his hand in every happening; this is what it means to be contemplative in the heart of the world.”

Blessed Teresa of Calcutta

“Consecrated persons are called to practice ‘open thought’. Interaction with the cultures and values we are messengers to conditions our life to embrace the differences, and to see I them the signs of God. The intelligent and loving wisdom of contemplation trains for a vision that knows how to evaluate, accommodate, and relate everything to Love” (No. 55).

Contemplate: to consecrated men and women on the trail of Beauty.

Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and societies of Apostolic Life (2015).

Dear Fr. Baby Elikal, MI

Provincial of the Camillian Province of India

Members of the Provincial Council and all the Camillian confreres from India

Health and peace in the Lord of our lives!

On the occasion of the canonical erection of the Camillian Province of India, I took this moment not just only to attend the ceremony but to complete my fraternal visit to the then Vice Province of India which started last April 2015. On this visit, I was privileged to be accompanied by two other members of the Consulta, Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon, the Secretary General, who came to India for the first time and Fr. Aris Miranda, Consultor for Ministry, who was with me during my first visit. I was able to visit four more communities in Nagpur (minor seminary), Hyderabad (ministry), Eluru (minor seminary) and Aluva (ministry).

Canonical erection of a Province is an official ceremony performed by any Religious institute who suffices the minimum requirements of becoming a Province as mandated by the Constitution and Statutes of the Order such as 1) sufficient number of religious and communities, 2) financial capability, and 3) consistent apostolic activities. (cf. *Const. 93*). Though numbers matter in constituting a Province, it didn't make you a Province. These conditions represent your desire to contribute to an efficient governance of the Order and readiness to respond with compassion and competence to the pressing needs of our ministry of witnessing the mercy of God to the suffering poor sick and responding to the new signs of the times. (cf. *Const. 92*). Moreover, this is not a proclamation of once independence from someone but rather a confirmation of once autonomy and capacity to govern in view of fulfilling the shared vision of the Order as embodied in our charism.

Thirtyfive years had passed since the Camillian set foot in India with a mandate of the Provincial Chapter of the then Lombardo Venetian Province in 1980 through the late Fr. Crotti who planted and nurtured this mission with the help of a few Italian missionaries and some local collaborators (diocesan and religious). Since then, the mission has shown its significant growth in terms of membership, initiatives and

capacities, and constantly maturing in leading this mission until reaching its full status as a Province on February 2, 2016. I have been a witness to this process since my first visit in 2015 (April 17-27) when we have discussed the motion of the then Camillian vice Province of India to raise its status to a Province. I remember well during my fraternal visit to the different communities particularly in the south, how excited and enthusiastic our dear confreres to welcome this moment of a new life to the mission of India.

In this message I would like to focus on three salient aspects of this new Province: a) the new thrust of the new Province b) its strength and opportunities, and c) the challenges that is felt and need to be confronted.

The New Province

Our Constitution states clearly the objective/s of establishing a structure called a Province. “This essential step is geared towards achieving a more efficient government of the Order in order to meet the pressing needs of our ministry effectively according to your specific social and local circumstances.” (*Const., Art. 92*). As I mentioned above, this is not just simply a numbers game. The raising to the status of a Province is always in view of the pressing needs of our ministry that requires efficient governance in order to protect the interest of the sick persons or communities and the Order by proclaiming the gospel of mercy and healing their infirmities with the “medicine” (compassion) of the Good Samaritan as modeled by St. Camillus de Lellis.

In these 35 years of existence, I have noticed the tremendous and impressive growth of this Province in the areas of formation and ministry. The mission made a good start with a clear vision of securing first the formation of candidates that will be at the forefront of our ministries in the near future. At present, you have six formation houses: 3 minor seminaries in the north and south, and 1 philosophate, novitiate and theologate with 97 candidates (pre-novices) and 3 temporary professed (post-novices). At present you have 53 solemnly professed religious immersed in the various ministries of the Province: health and community centers for persons with HIV/AIDS and the physically and mentally challenged children and adults, pastoral health care formation, animation (diocese and episcopal conference) and counseling, chaplaincy, community centers for elderly, destitute, and terminally ill patients, spiritual animation through giving retreats and recollections, health promotion, and disaster response. This pluriformity of ministry in India has proven your high level of awareness and appropriate response to the pressing needs of the time with careful consideration to the available resources (human and financial) at your disposal.

It is worth mentioning here your creative response to the one of the great social pandemics in the past, the HIV/AIDS. In this response, you have proven your courage and ability to combat this malady with an integral vision of care to the affected persons. It is a known and much appreciated model of care in India and abroad. You have perfected this type of care. Nevertheless, you remained open to the new challenges and dared to respond to it with confidence and trust in each one’s capability and energy. To mention some such as chaplaincy, spiritual animation, disaster response, health promotion initiatives, etc. Moreover, you have manifested your unprecedented generosity to the Provinces and Delegations of the Order by sending 18 religious for a mission abroad (Ireland, Austria, Italy, USA, Uganda). You have also participated in the short-term missions of the Order as organized by the then Camillian Task Force which is now called the Camillian Disaster Services International (CADIS).

The Sources of your Strengths

While looking at the present situation of this new Province, I asked myself where you got all this energy, courage and dynamism. Is it because that you are all young and vibrant? Or is it because the

“weaning period” (when foreign missionaries left) came at its earliest period that made you tried and tested? Is it because of societal pressures or the culture of learning that drives India to becoming the world’s third largest economy in less than two decades from now? There must be several reasons and sources of this strength and vitality but I will not focus so much on those details. Here, allow me to point out certain values that to us animate this province and nurture its existence. This could be also a learning experience to the emerging young Provinces of the Order in the near future.

It took almost sixteen (16) years for the Camillians in India to build its basic and most essential foundation of this Province, that is, the formation of candidates and only then later you have invested efforts to organize the specific ministries to the sick. Much energy and resources were invested in formation. If not because of this, you won’t be able to reach this period of your history in a short period of time. Six formation houses strategically located were established. This is a well-thought strategy of securing the future of this mission. I was delighted to know that your first formators were not Camillians but dedicated religious who long to see the growth not only of their respective congregations but the Church as a whole. You have Fr. George Padannamackal, a Carmelite (1983-84) and Fr. Paulinus Vadakkepattany, a Benedictine (1984-1990). There were also diocesan priests who took care of your spiritual formation.

This Province from the very beginning has been taught to become more open and welcoming to God’s ways and providence. The greatest gifts that the Lord has showered to this Province in its beginning are the persons – the Camillians and non Camillians - who nurtured and formed you to become a true radical disciple of Christ following the example of St. Camillus de Lellis. There is this famous song of an unknown composer entitled “Persons are Gifts” and the lyrics go this way *“Persons are gifts of God to me, that come all wrapped so differently. Some so loosely, others so tightly, but wrappings are not the gift.”* You have learned to trust, treasured and shared this gift of persons. When you trust others, you have learned also to trust yourself. It is the mutual trust and openness that made you who you are as a Province at present. This is one of your greatest strength.

You were taught to be courageous and to be prepared to take risks. We are aware of the fact that it is not easy for a missionary to obtain visa in India except for study purposes which is granted only for a short period of time with a possibility of renewing. And yet, you have been guided by God to find your way because you have a clear vision and intention of making the Camillian presence in India be felt by the Church and the society at large. Your former provincial superior Fr. Vittorio Paleari in his message to you said: “Every choice involves elements of risk; if there is no risk, it means that our confidence is founded too much on human reasonings and little on the mystery of God who calls, encourages and invites us even beyond our understanding.” This attitude which is almost like a “leap to the absurd” is reflected in the pluriformity of your ministry. You have responded to the great malaise of the time and up to the present challenges of climate change that caused immense suffering of the most vulnerable people and death to hundred thousands of innocent lives yearly. The courage to take risk is your greatest strength and asset that builds God’s hope in you.

Another aspect, which is worth mentioning, is the system of governance. You don’t allow a single hand to operate in all your initiatives. You are reaping the fruit of trust that has been sown. You multiplied your “hands” (building and trusting on the individual capacities of the confreres) in order to reach more the most neglected ones in the society and at the same time maintaining the “body”, (the structure of unity of the Province) the fountain of strength and energy that delivers nutrients to the hands so that it will keep reaching and stretching it to others. You have given a chance to the confreres to develop themselves through formal studies, to handle responsibilities of leadership at a young age and to express their creativity faithful to our vision. In the message of Pope Francis to the 24th World Day of the Sick 2016, reflecting on the first miracle of Jesus at Cana, he gave equal importance to the role of the servants who filled the jars with water before He turned it into wine. To combat the evils of sickness in our society today, we need

more *collaboration* (co-labor, i.e., working together respecting each other's capability on a shared goal) than *cooperation* (co-operate, i.e., performing together while working even selfish yet common goals). This is quite evident in your ministries wherein several actors and stakeholders, lay and religious, Christians and non-Christians are involved.

If we dig deeper into these strengths, the only thing that hold them together is your deep spiritual foundation. We are aware that one of the predominant characteristics of your culture is the thin distinction between spiritual life and ordinary life. This characteristic is further nurtured and enriched in your life as consecrated persons. You have established a team of spiritual animators of the Province and a Secretariat for spiritual and community life. This keeps you more alive and happy and not just simply because you are all young. I can feel your joy and enthusiasm. This very important initiative can be very inspiring for all in the Order.

No More Empty Spaces yet More Opportunities for Improvement

The inner strengths that you have are bearing fruits in your ministerial presence in India and abroad. For the record, since 1996 when you first opened the home for the aged called Snehadaan in Bengaluru, now, you have grown your presence to about nine (9) areas of ministry: a] pastoral health care ministry and hospital chaplaincy (4), b] spiritual animation (2), c] health and community centres for the HIV/AIDS (7), d] health care center for mentally and physically challenged (1), e] social and community centres (3), f] social and pastoral health animation (4), g] disaster ministry (1), h] health ministry in the local church, i] health promoting initiatives (3) and the missions abroad of some religious (18). With these numbers, you have explored well the immense possibilities of making the mercy and compassion of God to the most suffering and vulnerable persons be preached and be lived.

Considering the demands and the constantly changing social conditions of the time, it might be overwhelming and draining to some of you or to most of you. It entails a good sense of time management and balancing of ministerial, personal and spiritual activities. Several of your communities have only two religious which is typical of the real situation of missions. Our Constitution speaks of at least three members per community. Apart from this fact, some communities have outreach activities, i.e., communities that engaged themselves in ministerial activities both within the institution such as a center for persons living with HIV/AIDS, destitute, aged, formation houses, etc., and at the same time outside this institution doing sacramental ministries in the parish, hospitals, and convents of sisters and spiritual animations through conducting retreats. Moreover, in these past four years, you have engaged with a month long activity being away from the community in responding to disasters. This shows your flexibility and capacity to organize among yourselves. I did not see any anomaly in this situation. However, you need to step back for a while and reflect before you take the next move. It is also a way of reviewing your motivations and intentions at the same time recharging yourselves physically and spiritually.

Lead by the spiritual animation team/s of the Province, you have begun establishing community spiritual networks whose main objective is to pray for one another and for others. While it could be done individually and spontaneously, it makes a lot of difference if it is done collectively in an organized way. It sustains and encourages one another to make it a habit. Praying for one another is a great act of humility by recognizing the truth that we are nothing and we can do nothing apart from God. You become ready to submit yourself to Him and trust in His Providence. In view of this, may I suggest one thing. Why don't you expand this network to other Provinces, Delegations or the General Government? While I have no doubts that you have been praying for others, it would be if you can organize and encourage others to do the same mutually.

You have developed so much in terms of publication and communication. You have utilized both the print and the worldwide web media. Communication is among the three priorities of the Order to be fully developed by the year 2020. The amplitude of your ministry and the dynamic way of life of the Province need to be communicated. Don't keep the light remain hidden under a bushel basket so that it will shine on others. May I encourage you to send regularly to the communication office of the General Government all the good news that you may have. This is not meant simply to boost your career as a new Province but to share the achievements that you may have. This will encourage others to do the same and become a vehicle to strengthen our identity as one Camillian family.

In concluding this message, I would like to express in my name and in the name of Fr. Aris Miranda and Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon, the General Consultors who were with me in visiting our Camillian communities, our "hearty thank you". Starting from our arrival and the first day of our visit, we were really touched by the "*hearty welcome*" and care accorded to us until our departure to Rome with your generosity, hospitality, gentleness and closeness in attending to our needs. Our gratitude to you Fr. Baby Elikal, for your availability in being with us in the visits to the communities taking nothing more than eleven flights in five days, an exhausting agenda, passing thru many airports, checking points, waiting time at the crowded airport lounges, going thru tight security measures... in your huge country in order to reach our confreres in their locality... but we met them and it was good to be with them. Thanks again and our sincere congratulation to this achievement as a Province.

May Saint Camillus our founder and father, ever protect all of you in this new journey as the newest Camillian Province of our beloved Order. My our blessed mother, Mary Health of the Sick, intercede for all of you before God in order to remain faithful instruments of His merciful love and becoming a living testimony of the Samaritan compassion in the health care world by taking care of the sick ones.

Fraternally yours,

Roma, February 11, 2016
XXIV World day of the Sick
Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes

Fr. Leocir Pessini
General Superior

Fr. Aris Miranda
General Consultor for the Ministry

Fr. Gianfranco Lunardon
General Secretary

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